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Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Slavery in Mauritania

Society for Threatened Peoples is deeply concerned about the implementation of the "Roadmap to combat the consequences of slavery" which was published by the Mauritanian Government on March 6, 2014. This Roadmap is divided into 29 points and describes the judicial, economic and social measures in order to fight against the consequences of slavery. Mauritania abolished slavery in 1981 but this practice persists in the country. Slavery mostly affects Haratine people who are slave descendants.

The Mauritanian state took several decisions in order to eradicate slavery, but did not succeed. Mauritania is party to all international conventions concerning Human rights and prohibiting slavery. In 2007 Mauritania passed the law 2007-048, criminalizing slavery, but the Mauritanian President does not recognize that slavery still exists in Mauritania.

A common practice for prosecutors in Mauritania is to reclassify cases under other charges. Since the promulgation of the law 2007-048, only two criminal trials have been opened and there has not been adequate sentencing. Special courts for slavery cases have been created and the judges took up office in December 2015. On December 31, 2015, two people were arrested and charged with practice of slavery. The association "Anti-Slavery International" appealed against their release on bail. For now, these two persons are still in prison.

The authorities are not willing to implement the law 2007-048, and furthermore, they may block cases from being reported. The victims do not feel they are protected and the masters are confirmed in their belief of impunity. In addition the agency "TADAMOUN" established by the Roadmap does not sufficiently support victims of slavery. The agency was supposed to but did not establish projects of integration for former slaves. The programs are predominantly intended for the fight against poverty, instead of focusing on victims of slavery.

Civil society organizations, such as those relatives to human rights and fight against slavery, are not supported by the government, as is illustrated by the imprisonment of Biram Dah Abeid, president of "IRA-Mauritania", Brahim Bilal Ramdane, vice-president of "IRA-Mauritania" and Djiby Sow, president of the organization "Kawtal". A large number of violent arrests of activists, who were peacefully demonstrating for the release of the three activists mentioned shows the determination to silence the voices of people fighting against slavery.

To conclude, this Roadmap is a step in fighting against slavery in Mauritania, which will be considered as effective and positive once it is properly implemented.

Recommendations

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the government of Mauritania to:

- Fully implement the "Roadmap to combat the consequences of slavery";
- Step up efforts to eradicate the continued practice of slavery through the new special tribunals for slavery;
- Provide more transparency in the work of the State, the jurisdictions and the Agency TADAMOUN;
- Encourage a greater participation of victims in making projects and decisions regarding their lives;
- Recognize that slavery still exists in Mauritania.